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Hollywood's most successful director returns with another monster hit that'll have you running for the exits.

Find out how **Steven Spielberg** made the big screen even bigger.

SPIELBERG'S "WORLD"

Be on NPR's
"This I Believe"

TV makeover gurus' summer fashion advice

Secret to a longer life: whole grains

Blaine Larsen, Nashville's boy wonder

War of the Worlds opens nationwide June 29.

believe that," he tells me, "but I stepped out of character to make a really scary summer movie."

At 58, Spielberg is still boyish, with a slightly larger-than-normal cranium and a neatly clipped white beard. He has a wide, easy smile, and his manner is surprisingly disarming. Between camera set-ups, he sits with Kaminski, singing a cheerful Yiddish tune and joking with the crew about needing a "non-caffeine drink." Spielberg has never liked coffee. "How about a Mountain Dew?" someone offers.

"That's nothing but caffeine," he snaps, with mock indignation.

"Red Bull," says the next guy.

"Maybe a Jolt," another crewperson says, causing a group chuckle. Spielberg settles on a Sprite, and work resumes.

During the 85-day shoot, Spielberg roughed up his actors. They were covered in mud and water, sometimes in frigid temperatures. But they played just as hard as they worked. During scary scenes, Cruise would tickle Fanning. And off camera, everyone acted out scenes from *Napoleon Dynamite*. "The scarier and darker a film becomes, the more giggle room you have," Spielberg says. On *Jaws*, "when we weren't homesick and throwing up over the side of the Orea, we were laughing hysterically at how silly it looked to have two boats tugging a 26-foot, non-working model

of a great white shark through the water."

Jaws, which turns 30 this summer, is the movie that made Spielberg famous — and people afraid to go into the water. But it was such a production disaster he thought his career was finished. "I had little idea I was making a good movie until I put it in front of an audience and got the happiest shock when they were screaming and tossing popcorn into the air — some running for the exit," Spielberg laughs.

Over the years, he has had his share of failures, beginning with *1941* and as recently as *The Terminal*. But when his movies work, they're a license to print cash. The 21 films he's directed have a total estimated box office of \$3.2 billion, the most of any director.

Part of what has made him so successful is his flair

for storytelling. He seems to know by instinct the visual language audiences speak. He can create characters that are instantly empathetic (*Raiders of the Lost Ark*), or invest machines with personalities (the 18-wheeler in *Duel*). Another part of his genius derives from his uncanny capacity to identify the zeitgeist, the spirit of the times. Few directors have been able to tap into this vein of energy flowing through the



War of the Worlds, 2005



Close Encounters of the Third Kind, 1977



E.T., 1982

culture and give it form the way Spielberg has. Even *Amistad*, hardly a hit, is credited with fueling the national debate on slavery reparations. Henry Louis Gates Jr., the Harvard intellectual who worked as a consultant on that film, calls him "an almost poetic kind of director."

Cruise still recalls the time he went around recruiting people at a family picnic in Kentucky to eat early so they could stand in line to see *Jaws* before it sold

out. When *E.T.* previewed, Cruise says, "I saved 14 seats with my sister, Lee Anne, because I wanted my whole family to see Steven Spielberg's new movie as soon as possible." Waiting for them to arrive, "I almost got into a fight with some guy. He was like, 'Where are the people?!' I said, 'They're coming. I've

got tickets! I had to bring the usher down to verify it. It was hilarious."

War of the Worlds opens with Cruise, a dockworker too busy being a kid himself (he keeps the engine for his '66 Mustang in the kitchen) to be a father. His ex-wife brings the kids for the weekend. Shortly after, aliens hurl an electromagnetic pulse that shuts down the planet. This makes the populous much more manageable for the aliens, who then come out of the sky and ground. "It's more terrifying when it's a life form of great intelligence," Spielberg says, "and I think we emphasized how well coordinated these attacks are."

Science fiction, at least the best of its kind, is a metaphor for contemporary issues. No wonder each iteration of *War of the Worlds* has arrived in a period of public angst. At the start of the Cold War, audiences saw George Pal's 1953 movie

SCIENCE FICTION OFTEN IS A METAPHOR FOR CURRENT EVENTS.

about aliens crash-landing on Earth and thought one thing: The commies are coming to get us! Fifteen years before, as the Nazis menaced the world, Orson Welles created a panic with his radio broadcast. "After 9/11," Spielberg says, "*War of the Worlds* is [again] a reflection on how scared we are. This movie turns American families into refugees; it's something America has never experienced."

There is another way to read the movie, one closer to H.G. Wells' intentions. The novel was an allegory about the death of over-reaching British colonialism, where Wells cast the English as the invaders instead of the invaders. "You can read our movie several ways," says screenwriter David Koepp. "It could be straight 9/11 paranoia. Or it could be about how U.S. military interventionism abroad is doomed by insurgency, just the way an alien invasion might be." Audiences will have to decide for themselves.

One afternoon in April, I sat with Spielberg for 70 minutes and chatted casually about what forms him. Spielberg is electric to be around. He's witty and gracious, a man who thinks about many subjects.

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Duel, 1971

WAR OF THE WORLDS: JAMES HANAU; PHOTOFEST; E.T.: UNIVERSAL; DUEL: UNIVERSAL COLLECTION

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From top: In Spielberg's latest alien pic, with Tom Cruise, the visitors aren't as friendly as in *Close Encounters* and *E.T.* His terrifying TV movie *Duel* jump-started his career.

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